

Some Parents Express Concerns about Lack of Auditory-Oral Education Resources

November 1999 to present

Some parents of deaf/hh children in the Treasure Valley were unsatisfied with the lack of resources allocated to oral (non-signing) education. A series of letters were exchanged between these parents, the Governor's Office, the State Board of Education (SBOE), the State Department of Education (SDE), the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind (ISDB), the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee (JFAC), and Senator Hal Bunderson.

Essentially, the parents were bringing their concerns to the attention of policymakers in an effort to increase funding for Auditory-Oral educational services. The parents argued that the presence of a costly residential campus operation consumed the majority of the deaf/hh education funds in an inequitable way, leaving other students with insufficient resources. They further contended that Idaho's delivery model favored signing-based communication and inherently discriminated against families who chose oral communication.

The following are selected quotes from some of these letters:

Parents to Former Governor's Office – *"Parents of the hearing impaired remain uninformed of all options, and important language goals are set without a full understanding of the ramifications of these choices... After feeling the pressure to conform and the discouragement about oral language choices in Idaho, some families have reluctantly moved out of state or sought assistance from other states in pursuing oral language choices... Language ramifications of uninformed choices can be devastating..."*¹

Parents to Former ISDB Outreach Director – *"We have not seen any evidence in three years that unbiased information regarding oral options is being provided. Parents express pain, betrayal and frustration that they have not been fully informed."*²

Parents to SDE – *"ISDB has no oral language services and thus should either relinquish funding for these children back to the State Department of Education and Local Education Agencies (LEA) or provide adequate oral language services in the least restrictive environment (LRE)."*³

Parents to Former SBOE Executive Director – *"As the Superintendent of a state institution we would expect him [a former superintendent] to have more knowledge of communication options for the population he 'serves,' as well as a basic understanding of valid research."*⁴

¹ Letter from parents and professionals to Governor Kempthorne (11-29-99)

² Letter from parents to ISDB Outreach Director, Vickie Roper (1-20-00)

³ Letter from parents to the State Department of Education, Jane Zornik (2-14-00)

⁴ Letter from parents to the Executive Director of the State Board of Education, Greg Fitch (2-16-00)

Parents to SDE – “It is our contention that ISDB does not fulfill this responsibility. They do not ‘assist and provide appropriate educational services’ for hearing impaired children who use oral methods of communication. They only provide services for children who use sign language. Those who communicate using other methods are not served and their educational needs are not being adequately met.”⁵

Parents to legislators – “We...ask our senators and representatives to hold ISDB accountable for these gross deficiencies and misappropriations.”⁶

Parents to Former SBOE Executive Director – “Idaho educators of the deaf, the State Department of Education and the State Board of Education should be very ashamed of the lack of appropriate programs for deaf children with cochlear implants and hearing aids.”⁷

Parents to JFAC Members – “...children with cochlear implants or digital hearing are routinely left with out any Auditory-Oral habilitation in this state.”⁸

Parents to Former SBOE Executive Director – “...with ISDB in charge of state services for the deaf and hard of hearing, living in Idaho, quickly becomes a liability, not an advantage.”⁹

Parents to Senator Bunderson – “I am very concerned that the Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CDHH) is recommending a ‘modest residential component’ in its purposed (sic) future model for ISDB. A ‘modest residential’ facility is the aspect of service delivery that has crippled the current system.”¹⁰

Parent to Senator Bunderson – “ISDB has proven itself impossible to work with. At every turn for necessary and appropriate funding, families are flatly denied... Please **obtain immediate and necessary funding for Auditory Oral programs in the state with oversight from a separate entity from ISDB.** I believe your committee could realistically move on this vision by the end of the year... These immediate needs could press forward without an intensive ‘feasibility’ study.”¹¹

⁵ Letter from parents to the State Department of Education, Jane Zornik (3-22-00)

⁶ Letter from parents to Idaho legislators (1-25-05)

⁷ Letter from parents to the Executive Director of the State Board of Education, Gary Stivers (2-8-05)

⁸ Letter from parents to JFAC members (2-8-05)

⁹ Letter from parents to SBOE Executive Director (2-8-05)

¹⁰ Letter from parents to Senator Hal Bunderson (10-26-05)

¹¹ Letter from a parent to Senator Hal Bunderson (11-17-05)